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AUTHOR	Kirby, Edwin L.
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ABSTRACT

Speaking to a meeting of national program leaders, the Extension Service administrator points out that as an educational institution and as public employees paid from taxpayers' money the extension service has an obligation to serve all segments of society within the framework of its responsibilities. Questions raised involve whether equal opportunity in programs is provided through response to demands and whether innovative ways might be designed to stimulate participation among low income families and small farmers. The administrator calls upon program leaders to consider five ways which relate Extension Service goals to their own situations and asks for their assistance. (MS)

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Extension Service Responsibilities in Civil Rights

by

Edwin L. Kirby, Administrator

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It is my desire to visit informally and personally with each of you this morning, particularly as it relates to your responsibilities in Civil Rights. The traditional approach is to talk of "Agency or ES Responsibilities" but until each of us as staff members understand, accept, and feel an individual responsibility for improving our civil rights efforts we will not make as much progress as we could and should.

I have just completed one year as a member of the ES staff. About seven and one-half months have been spent as your Administrator.

Personally, I have been pleased with the progress made during this year. Your response to needed changes and your participation in helping to determine and support needed changes have been most outstanding.

Two of our most immediate achievements have been: (1) progress shown in a redefinition of our ES functions and responsibilities and reorganization of our staff resources in more effectively conducting these

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responsibilities; and (2) progress shown towards meeting our Civil Rights responsibilities.

These two major efforts are closely interrelated and until each of us understands and sees this relationship, individually we will not be able to contribute most effectively to fulfilling our roles. I am talking about our individual responsibilities as program leaders nationally for our specialties and about our individual responsibilities in dealing with civil rights problems in our role as program leaders.

I need your help in clarifying the relationship of these two major responsibilities. Let's think it through together and you help me to fill in the gaps so that together we can communicate most effectively with our counterparts in the States, as well as among ourselves and with others within USDA.

Let me start by reviewing with you the steps taken to clarify our ES functions and responsibilities as an Agency, as Units within ES and as individuals. You will recall that these discussions were initiated in preparation for our ES staff meeting on December 11, 1969. Many of you responded individually to the question,

"What should be the ES role in representing Extension nationally?" I attempted to summarize these as a basis for my presentation. Following this, most of you had opportunity within your administrative units to further develop more specific guidelines for your individual guidance within your unit.

These statements are now being considered by a joint ES-ECOP committee for publication and distribution.

One of the summary statements which I made at the December 11 meeting of ES staff was this:

"The primary function of an ES staff member is one of serving as a program leader or coordinator at the national level. As such he must be a self-starter, an innovator, a consultant, and a program manager within his field. He must be adept at maintaining wholesome relations with others within Extension, with others in USDA, and other Departments, with national and regional associations, organizations, and groups and with the general public. He must be a communicator and be competent in the preparation and dissemination of educational materials and information.

"He must be an analyzer and interpreter of new research and of conditions affecting his field. He must be an expert in 'helping people to know what there is to want' and have the ability to cause people to 'want what he has to offer'."

Whether or not you agree with this statement, it remains that you can and do have a profound influence on what happens in the States. What you say and do or do not say or do affects thousands of Extension workers across this country and literally hundreds of thousands of people who participate or should participate in our Extension programs. You are truly a national leader in your field. You help to guide the work of some 16,000 professional workers and another 10,000 program assistants or aides. You do influence program decisions at State and local levels by what you do or do not do.

Now, what does this have to do with Civil Rights? You will recall our all-day ES staff conference held here on March 2, 1970 at which time we discussed "The Responsibility We Have." You will remember that one of the key issues was the extent to which Extension

is considering program balance, defined as "a need to work with and assist all segments of society in these areas for which we have competence, should provide assistance, and have the legal and moral obligation to help."

Are our programs in balance? Do we serve only those who demand our services? Should we serve only those who have the greatest degree of need? Or, as a publicly supported educational agency or institution, do we have a responsibility to insure a balance in our program efforts?

Extension Directors across the country are giving serious consideration to these questions. Four regional meetings of Extension Directors have been held at which time this as well as other aspects of Civil Rights were discussed. Similar meetings of State program leaders and supervisors are being conducted on a sub-regional basis in order that they, in turn, can provide assistance and help to State specialists, area staff, and county Extension agents in every county in this country.

What then is your role in this comprehensive effort? As a national program leader, what influence are you making, could be making, or should be making?

Think about it!

One policy is crystal clear to me. As an educational institution and as public employees paid from taxpayers' money, we have an obligation to serve all segments of society within the framework of our responsibilities, and all segments of society must be represented in determining what is the appropriate balance in our educational assistance.

If you accept this statement as a sound description of policy, nationally, how are we doing? Office of Inspector General audits indicate some major problems. In fact, we have two States involved in court suits in which major charges include discrimination in equal opportunity to participate in programs - in planning and in receiving benefits.

I have made these comments and raised these questions in many places:

All segments of society--regardless of income levels, educational levels, color, or other factors, must be provided equal opportunity to our educational assistance.

Are we providing equal opportunity in our programs when we respond mainly to those who demand our assistance. Or, are we providing equal opportunity when the committees that assist us in planning and conducting Extension programs are composed almost entirely of the commercial farmer or affluent families with resulting programs designed primarily for them?

Do we need to consider innovative ways of stimulating the low-income families and small farmers to want to participate in programs designed primarily for them? Do we need to consider a balance in our educational efforts--program balance--in which all segments of our clientele may benefit?

It seems to me that throughout the Cooperative Extension System, we need to greatly expand our educational assistance in program development, methods of

involving people in planning and conducting programs and innovative teaching methods and pilot projects designed specifically to provide improved assistance especially to low-income, deprived, alienated, and minority groups.

We have submitted a carefully prepared document, prepared with assistance of the ECOP Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Civil Rights and approved by ECOP, to the Secretary's Office in which we made a strong commitment to strategies for overcoming the blocks and problems which tend to limit participation of minority groups in our Extension programs.

Your Individual Responsibilities

- If you accept your role as a national program leader in your specialty.
- If you accept the principle of program balance--the need to design specific programs for different levels in our society.
- If you accept the need to "help people to know what there is to want and cause them to want what we have to offer"
- If you accept the need to encourage participation of low-income, deprived, alienated and minority groups in our Extension programs.

What can you as an individual do to cause this to happen?

Until you can relate all of this to your own situation, internalize it in relation to your ongoing responsibilities, you will continue to be frustrated and less than most effective.

Let me point up some possibilities for your consideration.

1. You serve as a program leader and stimulator of new ideas at the State level with your counterparts. Through this process, you can by guidance and questions, be sure that they consider the need for program balance among all segments of society.

2. As you give guidance and assistance to developing and evaluating new, innovative programs, projects and methods, you can encourage your counterparts to consider specific programs for minority and low-income groups.

3. As you represent Extension at national and regional levels and serve on various committees at these levels, you can assist in getting adequate consideration for the needs of the hard to reach, alienated clientele.

4. As you analyze, interpret, prepare, and disseminate needed and useful information to counterparts in the States, you can include appropriate reference and materials for these groups.

5. Help to identify, and encourage consideration of employment of well-qualified minority group staff members.

These are only five areas in which you might relate specifically. You can and will determine others and perhaps more effective ways.

As States proceed with their discussions and training plans for improving their effectiveness in programs, each specialist will be looking to you for assistance.

Will you be ready? I have full confidence in your ability, desire, and intent to do your part. Together, we will respond positively to our Agency responsibilities.

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